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ABSTRACT

Some form of acccuntability for what comes out of schools is increasingly demanded. The cause-effect or means-end relationship assumed to underlie most institutional management strategies must be reexamined since the educational system must assure that individuals can cope with and profit from the other "teaching experiences" in the world around them. While advances in knowledge and technique make possible an institution where individual learning can be facilitated and assured, it is difficult for people to believe it possible since few have had the practical experience of managing resources to that end. The needed management procedures exist today--a goal-directed management process which permits both the present and desired operation of a school to be viewed from a common frame-of-reference focused on the learner. Implementation of an institutional policy of accountability--as a managerial ethic--must take into account the reality that educators have little control over many external factors affecting individual learning. The educational management process (in which administration is not considered as a function apart from teaching) is a continuing information feedback mechanism which holds the professional educator responsible or accountable, not for the discrepancies, but for doing something about them with the information provided. A policy of total institutional accountability can provide a management framework in which both the process and product can be perceived and dealt with together. (JS)

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EDUCATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Getting it All Together

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The enclosed paper is provided as background for the seminar on Educational Accountability of the Annual Texas Conference for Teacher Education, October 25 - 27, 1970. The question it should raise is whether any performance or objective-based procedure, whether in teacher preparation or classroom practice, is implementable in an institutional environment which is not similarly, and totally, oriented to output expressed in terms of learning performance.

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EDUCATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY: Getting it All Together

Lewis A. Rhodes

I. The Growing Demand for Assurance

Interest in some form of fiscal accountability for what the American public puts into the education of its young people has been with us for a long time. In recent months, however, it has become increasingly evident that some form of accountability for what comes out of the schools is demanded as well.

Competition for increasingly limited tax dollars has evoked demands for assurance that public monies be used most wisely in accomplishing the purposes of public institutions. Moreover, the lack of any large-scale pay-off for the millions of federal and foundation dollars already put into solving the old and new problems of our schools has frustrated both the dreamer and the pragmatist.

A number of factors other than economic have deepened the concern about the effectiveness of schools. Visible problems such as dropouts, student militancy and drug use have been attributed by some to weaknesses of schools. Furthermore, the professional educator finds himself increasingly frustrated in his attempts to bring together and apply his resources in ways which will produce the results which both he and the public desire. And finally, the students themselves cry out for an education with personal meaning in the context of today's world.

If one common desire could be said to underlie these varied concerns about the effectiveness of our schools, it is the mutual need for assurance that students will be affected positively by what happens in schools.

- What the American public wants is assurance that the resources which they devote to education will have the effect on their children that the educator has so long promised.

- What the dedicated educator wants is assurance that he will have the opportunity and resources to have a positive effect on the children with whom he comes in contact.

- What the concerned student wants is assurance that he will be recognized and dealt with as an individual human being.

To have schools accomplish what they set out to do seems like a basic and simple idea. Many critics inside and outside of education find it increasingly difficult to understand why it is so hard to provide this commonly-desired assurance that educational actions will have desired consequences. Even in a world in which it appears that the only thing certain is uncertainty, the laws of cause and effect still should function. It would seem to some that if all parties appear to agree on the basic need to have desired, positive effects on learners - then all that should be required would be to plan for it to happen and operate the school so it does happen. This form of educational management would appear to be a relatively simple process and well within the management capabilities and resources of a society which has demonstrated that systematic planning and management can turn moon-reaching dreams into realities.

Why then has there been so little success with efforts to plan and operate education in a manner which would more certainly make possible the results desired by all?

II. Assurance of Means or Ends?

A principal factor contributing to the inability to assure increased effectiveness and productivity in education has been the cause-effect or means-end relationship which has been assumed to underlie most institutional management strategies. Institutions are created by man to facilitate and regularize the satisfaction of particular needs - religious, educational, regulatory, etc. They are established, therefore, as means to the attainment of his ends. Their structure, at any time in history, is an expression of what was felt desirable and possible at that time.

This fact, that institutional goals are constrained by what it is felt possible to accomplish, becomes an important concern today when rapid technological change continually brings into the realm of possibility goals and desires once considered unattainable. It has always been true that each succeeding generation would begin by unquestioningly assuming what its parents had to painstakingly learn. But what an environment of rapid technological change has done is to stretch these normal differences in assumptions into the much-talked about "gaps" between generations, values, understandings, etc.

The institution of education serves as a good example. A lifetime of personal experiences with schools has helped form a picture, in most adult minds, of the school as a place where teaching is the primary function. While it is true that learning has been the hoped-for consequence of this teaching, the accomplishment of teaching has been all that could be assured, planned for, and realistically managed. Spaces have been designed to facilitate teaching, equipment and materials have been developed to aid teaching, time is scheduled to make best use of teaching time, and it followed, naturally, that educational improvement has been most frequently viewed as the improving of teaching.

It should be noted that as long as education was "working" it was really unnecessary to question the cause and effect relationship between teaching and learning. The logic began to undergo questioning, however, as the evidence that it was not always functioning properly became more visible in society; and as a new generation began to assess the performance of the institution against both what it had been saying it was going to do and what they felt it was now possible to do.

A further contribution to the deterioration of the traditional view of the teaching-learning cause and effect relationship has been the accessibility of a great number of alternative "causes" which contribute to the "effect". The improvement of learning through changes in classroom procedures alone was a valid assumption when most of the opportunities for a child to learn occured in close proximity to where

"teaching" took place. However, in an electronically-linked world, in which a child perceives far-distant events and people within his immediate frame of experience, this is no longer true. The opportunities for learning presented in school situations are being overshadowed by the increasing availability of experiences related to the "real" world which are now accessible to the learner outside of the classroom. Since his learning is the product of <u>all</u> these experiences, it is no longer completely possible to assume a positive correlation between what a child learns and what happens to him in but a single one of these experiences - school. The process of learning is still related to the process of teaching. The only difference is that experiences which "teach" are now accessible to a child in many places, at many times.

It should not be surprising then that schools begin to appear irrelevant to contemporary needs, that they be accused of operating as ends in themselves, that alternatives to schools, including no schools at all, are seriously under consideration. The tragedy is that the need for, and role of, education in our society today, rather than being diminished, has expanded and taken on new importance. This does not contradict the proposition above that the school is but one "teaching" input for today's students. It becomes even more vital now to have an educational system which can <u>assure</u> that individuals have the skills and processes which will permit them to cope with, and profit from, the other "teaching" experiences in the world around them.

III. Accountability as a Management Ethic

Accountability, it has been said, is a way of assuring that "we did what we said we were going to do". This concept of accountability is a managerial ethic which is usually prescribed by regulation in business and industry, but which is assumed on faith in the management of the professions. Lawyers, doctors, educators, and clergymen are, by professional definition, supposed to be in practice to meet the needs of their individual clients. Periodically in history however, and usually after a jump in the level of knowledge in society, the standard practices of each of the social professions and institutions become questionable because they no longer reflect what it is possible to do to accomplish society's objectives and meet individual needs.

Today education stands exposed, with all the other professions, before society's demands for assurance that its actions be responsive to the requirements of the times. Unfortunately, in the case of education, while advances in knowledge and technique have made it possible to have an institution today where individual learning can be facilitated and assured, there are few people, inside or outside of education, or, for that matter, on either side of the "generation gap", who have had the experience of realistically managing resources to that end. Without practical experience with which to interact, it is exceedingly difficult to really believe that individual learning can be a direct, rather than secondary, objective to which resources and human efforts can be systematically committed and directed.

This central belief in the primacy, and practical possibility, of learning-referenced goals cannot be "taught", but must be developed from actual problem-solving experience in the regular operation of a school. Without this implicit conviction as a focal point for organization, it is impossible to design and operate educational institutions which can provide meaningful assurance - to the public that its resources are being applied most productively;-to the professional educators that they will have the support to apply their knowledge and skills to the promotion of learning; - or to the learners themselves that their needs will be appropriately met.

IV. Getting It All Together

Many of the performance or objective-based management and instructional techniques which are being promoted under the concept of educational accountability today permit an institution to make an initial jump into operating procedures which can partially provide this assurance. These specific techniques whether in the area of planning, operation, or assessment can serve as catalyst demonstrations around which concepts, attitudes and operating practices can be developed. Demonstrations of specific practices alone, however, will not be sufficient to bring about the changes in attitudes, relationships, and, ultimately, practices in the overall institution. For all the money that has been invested in them over the past twenty (20) years, there is little in the way of evidence that isolated "demonstrations" are an effective

way to bring about institutional change. It may therefore be assumed that these demonstrated planning, operating and evaluation techniques will have little overall effect unless an educational institution can capitalize on the new insights, attitudes and practices and can focus them on the common learning concerns of the parents, professional educators and students.

Management procedures which can make possible the active linking of these techniques in a broader, participatory problem-solving process do exist today. They have been developed principally from social and behavioral research and consist generally of processes for first identifying individual and/or institutional goals and the current status relative to those goals. Information is then provided as to the discrepancy between the two positions - where a student, program or school is, - compared to where it wanted or had the capability to be. This discrepancy information, coupled with knowledge of available human and material resources becomes the working pieces for a creative* management process designed to bridge the gap between practice and promise.

This goal-directed management process permits both the present and the desired operation of a school to be viewed from a common frame-of-reference focused on the learner.

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*Creativity: "the process of sensing gaps or disturbing missing elements; forming ideas of hypotheses concerning them; testing these hypotheses and communicating the results, possibly modifying and retesting the hypotheses."

E. Paul Torrance, Guiding Creative Talent (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962), p. 16.

Moreover, these reference points can be used as initial criteria for the measurement of effectiveness, and as focal points for the establishment of cooperative or coordinated efforts. This frame of reference, which permits problems to be re-stated in learning-referenced terms, can facilitate the development of new insights into the nature of the school today and what can be done to deal with its problems.

V. The Challenge of Accountability

An approach to a policy of accountability as a creative institutional challenge rather than an individual threat will be less likely to evoke resistance from practitioners who feel, from sad experience with a decade or more of learning-referenced innovations, that they cannot assure the attainment of any learning objective unless the institution is managed to support that end.

Any implementation of an institutional policy of accountability must take into account the reality that education and the school are no longer synonymous - that the educator has little control over many of the external factors which significantly affect the learning of individuals. For a policy of accountability to be applied to what a school can and should be doing, though, all parties concerned must recognize the educational management process as a continuing information feedback mechanism which is designed to hold the professional educator responsible or accountable, not for discrepancies, but rather for doing something about them with the information provided.

This role is analogous to that of a shipboard navigator who is not held responsible for the uncontrollable factors, (wind, current, geography) which result in "drift" from a planned course. He is accountable however, for doing something about them; for recognizing that they will affect his course, and planning accordingly; for turning them to his purposes wherever possible to get him where he wants to go more efficiently. Such navigators/managers do not see "drift" from course as a threat as much as part of the realistic environment in which they must work. The way they deal with it is similar to the educational management process which has been discussed in this paper. They start by identifying "where they are" and "where they want to go". Through the use of constant reference points they can approximately determine their position at all times. When "drift" or a discrepancy is noted, the course modification they recommend is seldom a course back to the original course but instead a new course to their goal. This new course is always a reasoned judgement, or "best guess" which is only as valid as the information on which it is based. What is important is not that it be an exact course but that it be in the direction desired - toward the objective. It is not that more specificity would not be desirable in this "homing-in" process, but given the sophistication of usually available instruments and the number of uncontrollable factors, satisfactory progress toward the goal can be made as long as

there will be continuing opportunities for determining where one is in relation to the goal and again modifying the course.

VI. Accountability and Institutional Renewal

The same navigational analogy may be useful for a consideration of the implications of this process for institutional growth. The course of the self-renewing institution is very much like that of a ship-for what is renewal but the ability to continually assess where an institution is against where it wants to be, and then to adjust procedures and organization to deal with the discrepancy which will always be apparent.

When an institution can articulate its ends in terms of affecting the performance of individual human beings and can measure each of its present actions against these same criteria then it becomes possible to envision new ways to "bridge" the gap between present levels of goal attainment and hoped for future ones. All the working pieces are visible and identifiable from a common reference point. With "where we are" and "where we want to be", both expressed in common terms, the management of education can become a goal directed evolutionary process -- a process that begins with schools as they are today and facilitates development both toward where it is desired, and where it is possible, to be. In such a "bridging", process, a self-renewing institution can become a reality.

VII. Accountability for Process and Product

While the interrelatedness of all social problems today is generally acknowledged, it is important to recognize the requirement for a comparable interrelationship of human efforts in dealing with them. We are well past the time when educational management or administration could be considered as a function apart from teaching. A policy of total institutional accountability can provide a management framework in which both the process and the product can be perceived and dealt with together. It is possible to assure today that the resources put into education will favorably affect the people coming out - that learning rather than teaching can be the direct objective and output of an education institution. American society has the wherewithal, and there is within education the professional desire and expertise to plan for it to happen, and to support and operate the institution so it does happen.

But what will be required, in addition, is that a generation that has no experience, itself, with this form of effort, be able to accept the belief that it is possible, and necessary to deal with process and product simultaneously and to have the courage to accept responsibility - to be accountable - for this process in which errors, or drift are of less concern than direction; where change as the consequence of continued "homing-in" on goals is no threat; and where the

stating of the question can be more important than the answer, but where the answer is most always expressed in terms of effects on human beings.' To survive as an institution, education must, and can, become accountable for both the process and the product.